



## Medication, Polypharmacy and Oral Health

**As Australians age, the incidence of chronic and systemic diseases increases and associated with this the increase in need for medications. Salivary flow and quality also tend to change as we age.**

There is often a need for the use of several medications at a time, called polypharmacy, which can include prescription, over-the-counter and complementary medicines.

Risks associated with polypharmacy can include adverse side effects of one or more medications being taken; in particular, some medications can affect oral health. Whilst it is important to take the medications that are prescribed to you in the correct dose, it is also important to understand any side effects these medications might have and to manage these appropriately.

A range of medications can lead to Dry Mouth Syndrome. As its name implies, Dry Mouth Syndrome refers to reduced salivary flow to the mouth, which leads to a 'dry' mouth. It can produce serious, negative effects on a person's quality of life, affecting dietary habits, nutritional status, speech, taste, difficulty with dental prostheses such as dentures, and increases susceptibility to dental decay. Some medications also contain sugar. The increase in dental cavities can be devastating, and therefore special care must be made to control this condition.

Drugs/medications that can cause a dry mouth include:

- + Cardiovascular medications (diuretics, calcium channel blockers)
- + Antidepressants and antipsychotics.
- + Sedatives
- + Central analgesics
- + Anti-Parkinson's medications
- + Anti-allergy medications
- + Antacids

People who are taking medications and who think they might be suffering from a dry mouth should talk with their dentist about their medications and their dentist can provide advice regarding treatment options. There are simple tests that your dentist can undertake to judge the quality and amount of your saliva.

Some medications also cause changes such as redness or ulcers in the soft tissues of the mouth (tongue, cheeks, gums). If you notice any changes in appearance or feel of your oral soft tissues, you should consult with your dentist.

Never stop taking a prescribed medication without consulting with your doctor. If you are taking numerous medications, have these regularly reviewed by your doctor in order to ensure that any adverse side effects are managed properly.